

**SAMPLE  
COUNSELING PROTOCOL  
STANDARD DAYS METHOD AND CYCLEBEADS**

**A. Provider requirements**

Family planning counselors, health educators, and medical personnel including physicians, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and nurses who are familiar with screening criteria for the Standard Days Method and proper use of CycleBeads.

**B. Mechanism of action/effectiveness**

The Standard Days Method is a natural method of family planning that provides simple instructions to a woman about when during her menstrual cycle she is likely to get pregnant if she has unprotected intercourse. It identifies days 8 through 19 of the menstrual cycle as potentially fertile. She avoids unprotected intercourse on all fertile days. The Standard Days Method is appropriate for women with menstrual cycles between 26 and 32 days long (approximately 80% of cycles are in this range).<sup>1</sup>

With perfect use, the Standard Days Method is very effective. For every 100 women who use the Standard Days Method for 1 year, less than 5 will get pregnant (5%). With typical use, it is less effective, with 12 out of 100 users (12%) experiencing a pregnancy in a year.<sup>2</sup>

CycleBeads are a visual tool that helps women use the Standard Days Method correctly. CycleBeads are a string of 32 color-coded beads that represent the days of the menstrual cycle. They help the woman **keep track** of her cycle days, identify whether or not she is fertile on that day, and **monitor** her cycle length.

- The day she starts her period, the woman moves the ring to the red bead to begin a new cycle and marks that day on her calendar. To keep track of her cycle days and know whether she is on a fertile day, the woman moves a rubber ring one bead every day. She avoids unprotected intercourse when the ring is on a white bead day. On all brown-bead days, pregnancy is very unlikely.
- To monitor her cycle length, the woman knows that if her period starts before moving the ring to the darker brown bead her cycle is shorter than 26 days. If she doesn't start her period by the day after moving the ring to the last brown bead, her cycle is longer than 32 days. If she has a cycle shorter than 26 or longer than 32 days more than once in a year, the Standard Days Method will not be sufficiently effective for her.

**C. Indications for use**

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<sup>1</sup> Arévalo M, Sinai I, Jennings V. A Fixed Formula to Define the Fertile Window of the Menstrual Cycle as the basis of a Simple Method of Natural Family Planning. *Contraception*, 2000; 60:357-360.

<sup>2</sup> Arévalo M, Jennings V, Sinai I. Efficacy of a New Method of Family Planning: the Standard Days Method, *Contraception*, 2002, 65:333-338.

The Standard Days Method is particularly suited for those who:

- Have most menstrual cycles between 26 and 32 days long
- Want to use a natural method
- Are able to avoid unprotected intercourse during 12 consecutive days (days 8 through 19) of the cycle
- Cannot or do not want to use a method that contains hormones or requires a medical procedure
- Are at low risk of STDs/HIV

#### **D. Contraindications**

The Standard Days Method is not appropriate for women who:

- Have irregular menstrual cycles, cycles shorter than 26 days or longer than 32 days
- Are not able to monitor their cycle days, identify the fertile and infertile days, and assess their cycle length
- Have difficulty avoiding unprotected intercourse on days 8 through 19 of their cycles

#### **E. Advantages**

- The Standard Days Method produces no side effects.
- The fertility awareness information it provides is useful for many women, regardless of which family planning method they use or whether they choose to use family planning at all.<sup>3</sup> Fertility awareness information can be used:
  - **To avoid pregnancy.** Couples should avoid unprotected intercourse during the entire fertile time.
  - **To conceive.** Couples have intercourse on days 8 through 19 when the woman is potentially fertile.
- Some couples like the active involvement of the male partner.

#### **F. Disadvantages**

- Offers no protection against STDs/HIV.
- Lack of the male partner's cooperation is an obstacle to correct use.
- Certain conditions may make the Standard Days Method more difficult to use and require more extensive counseling and follow-up:
  - Recent childbirth
  - Recent menarche
  - Approaching menopause
  - Recent discontinuation of some hormonal contraceptive methods

#### **G. Side Effects/Complications/Serious Adverse Effects**

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<sup>3</sup> Jennings V, Arévalo M, Kowal D. Fertility Awareness-Based Methods, Contraceptive Technology 18<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition, 2004; 317-329.

Users of the Standard Days Method are not at any increased risk of side effects, complications, or serious adverse effects.<sup>4</sup>

## **H. Initial visit for Standard Days Method**

A complete medical, social and sexual history must be completed for all family planning clients at the initial comprehensive clinical visit.

- SDM specific history:
  - Recent childbirth
  - Current or recent use of a contraceptive and type
  - Menstrual history
    - actual or approximate date of last menstrual period (LMP)
    - date next period expected
    - whether menses occurs consistently every month when not using a hormonal contraceptive method
  - Assessment for factors that affect cycle length
    - recent child birth
    - breastfeeding
    - current or recent use of hormonal contraception
    - recent induced or spontaneous abortion
  - Assessment for current pregnancy risk
    - if using a method, has it been used consistently since LMP? If not, date of last unprotected intercourse?
    - if not using a method since LMP, date of last unprotected intercourse?
  - Sexual history including risk assessment for STD/HIV
  - Assessment for factors that affect ability to avoid unprotected intercourse on fertile days
- Recommended physical examination:
  - Height and weight
  - Blood pressure
  - Thyroid
  - Heart and lung exam
  - Clinical breast exam
  - Abdominal exam
  - Pelvic exam including visual inspection and bimanual
  - Extremities and rectum
- Recommended laboratory testing: Cervical cancer screening according to documented history and current screening guidelines; STD and other lab testing including pregnancy testing according to history

## **I. Counseling for the Standard Days Method**

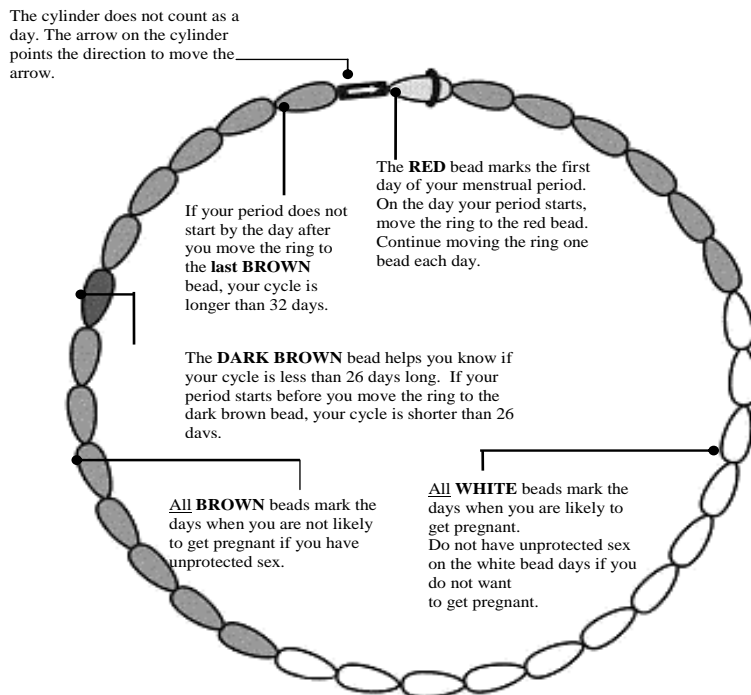
- Discuss all available contraceptive options
- STD/HIV prevention education and risk reduction counseling

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<sup>4</sup> WHO. Improving Access to Quality Care in Family Planning Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use Second Edition, 2000, FAB 1.

- Emphasize the following concepts:
  - The CycleBeads ring must be moved daily to identify fertile and infertile days and be able to monitor cycle length.
  - Client and partner must avoid unprotected intercourse on all fertile days (days 8 through 19, corresponding to the white beads) to prevent pregnancy.
  - When she starts her period again, she skips over any remaining brown beads and puts the ring on the red bead to begin a new cycle.
  - If she starts her period before moving the ring to the darker brown bead, she has had a cycle less than 26 days long; if she moves the ring to the last bead and does not start her period by the next day, she is having a cycle longer than 32 days long. If she has a short or long cycle more than once in a year (12 cycles), she should consider another method.
  - The Standard Days Method does not protect against STDs and HIV. If she believes she may have, or may be at risk of, an STD, she should contact the clinic or her provider.
  - If she has unprotected vaginal intercourse on a fertile day, she should contact the clinic or her provider.
  - If she does not start her period within 1 week after placing the ring on the last bead, she should contact the clinic or her provider. If she has difficulty remembering to move the ring every day, or if she and her partner cannot avoid unprotected intercourse on her fertile days, she should contact the clinic or her provider to discuss other more appropriate methods.

## CycleBeads



## **J. Follow up**

No routine follow up is needed for the Standard Days Method. However, clients may benefit from a brief counseling session after the first cycle of use to assess their cycle length and their ability to use the method correctly as well as their satisfaction with the method. At a follow up session, the following issues should be addressed:

- Check if her most recent menstrual cycle was within the 26 to 32-day range. If this is the first time her cycle is outside the 26 to 32 day range, she may continue to use the method with caution. She should return if she has a delayed or early period again.
- Determine whether she wants to continue using the method and can avoid unprotected intercourse on days 8 through 19.
- Determine if the couple is able to use the method correctly.
- If the woman thinks she may be pregnant or if she has missed a period, test for pregnancy.

Attached to this protocol is the Standard Days Method Screening Checklist to determine if clients who are interested in the method fit the screening criteria. Also included are questions to guide counseling during follow-up visits with clients who are using the method.